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FINAL 24 HANFORD TANKS REMOVED FROM CONGRESSIONAL WATCH LIST

Removal of the Tanks Closes the Wyden Watch List and Completes a Tri Party Agreement Milestone One Month Ahead of Schedule

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of River Protection (ORP) announced today the resolution of significant safety issues resulting in the removal of the final 24 Hanford high-level waste tanks from the Wyden congressional safety watch list. Closure of the final safety issue completes a Tri-Party Agreement milestone due September 30, 2001.

"Getting these tanks off the watch list is the result of years of effort to improve safe storage and to understand the nature of the waste in the tanks. We have confirmed the controls are in place to safely maintain the waste until it is retrieved and treated," said ORP Manager Harry Boston. "This important milestone brings us one step closer to closing the tanks for good. We will continue to monitor the tanks to ensure safe storage of the waste until we can send it to the Waste Treatment Plant."

There are 177 underground tanks in central Hanford that store approximately 53 million gallons of waste from decades of plutonium production. Twenty-eight of the tanks are newer doubleshell tanks that can hold over one million gallons of waste, and the remaining 149 are older single-shell tanks ranging in size from 500,000 to one-million gallons in storage capacity.

Senator Wyden authored a law in the early 1990s requiring the DOE to watchdog the most dangerous underground radioactive waste tanks at the Hanford Site. The law required identification of tanks having the potential for release of high-level waste from uncontrolled increases of temperature and pressure. Based on this, DOE identified four problem areas that could result in releases of high-level waste: generation of flammable gases; presence of flammable organic chemicals; presence of potentially explosive ferrocyanide; and high-heat levels generated by certain types of wastes.

"A decade ago, I responded to the dangerous threat posed by certain nuclear waste storage tanks at Hanford by passing a law to protect the people of the Northwest from possible radioactive tank explosions," Senator Ron Wyden said today at an event in Richland, Washington. "Today, I'm proud to see the watch list become extinct. The hard work of the Department of Energy and many others has helped protect the people of Hanford and communities down stream from the potentially devastating effects of a radioactive explosion."

"I am pleased to join Senator Wyden in celebrating the removal of the last tanks from the watch list," said Representative Doc Hastings. "Successful removal of all the tanks from the watch list eliminates one of the major risks to the citizens of the Northwest and is another example of the excellent progress the Office of River Protection is accomplishing."

A total of 60 tanks were added to the watch list since 1991. A maximum of 56 tanks were on the congressional watch list at the same time in May 1994. Since the passage of the act, DOE has made considerable progress towards resolving watch list safety issues. The ferrocyanide issue was resolved in 1996, the organic chemical issue was resolved in 1999, and the high heat issue in 2000.

Resolution of the flammable gas safety issue removed tank SY-101 - - nicknamed Hanford's "burping" tank in the 1980s - - in January 2001, and the remaining 24 tanks were removed with today's announcement. Removal of the remaining 24 tanks was based upon analysis of the waste, monitoring of tank conditions, and identification of potential hazards. Ventilation and monitoring of tank conditions and ignition source controls will remain in place on

all Hanford tanks until the waste is retrieved and delivered to the Waste Treatment Plant, scheduled to begin hot operations in 2007.

"Our employees have worked hard to improve the conditions in these tanks, not only to remove them from the watch list, but also to make them available for normal operations," said Fran DeLozier, President and General Manager of CH2M HILL Hanford Group, ORP's tank farms contractor. "We're proud of this accomplishment and of our efforts to improve safe storage of waste in the Hanford tanks."

The Tanks Advisory Panel assisted DOE in reviewing the documentation that concluded the safety issues were closed and that the tanks could be removed from the watch list. The panel includes experts from several universities and industry with expertise in hazardous waste, radioactive materials, and waste management. Dr. Mujid Kazimi, Chairman of the Nuclear Engineering Department at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, chairs the panel.

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Note: The Office of River Protection was created by Congress in 1998 to manage the nation's largest and most complex environmental cleanup project - retrieval and treatment of tank waste at the Hanford Site. More background information on the Office of River Protection can be found on the office's Web site at: <http://www.hanford.gov/orp>.

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